

#ARSACON

RESILIENT RURAL

30th Annual ARSA Conference

SEPTEMBER 17-19, 2025

Schedule and Breakout Session Information



GENERAL SCHEDULE

**RESILIENT
RURAL**
30th Annual ARSA Conference

WEDNESDAY *September 17*

12:30 PM - 4:00 PM: Exhibitor Setup & Conference Registration

1:00 PM - 4:00 PM: Advocacy Pre-Conference - "Leading Up in our Rural School Communities"

5:00 PM - 7:00 PM: Opening Reception

THURSDAY *September 18*

7:00–8:00 AM: Continental Breakfast & Exhibitor Time

8:00–9:25 AM: Welcome and Keynote - Brad McCoy

9:25–10:05 AM: Exhibitor Time

10:05–10:50 AM: Breakout Session I

11:00–11:45 AM: Breakout Session II

11:55 AM–12:40 PM: Breakout Session III

12:40–2:00 PM: Lunch and Keynote - Christian Jackson

2:00–2:40 PM: Exhibitor Time

2:40–3:25 PM: Breakout Session IV

3:35–4:20 PM: Breakout Session V

4:30–5:15 PM: Breakout Session VI

5:15–6:00 PM: Free Time

6:00–9:00 PM: Awards Banquet



FRIDAY *September 19*

7:00–8:00 AM: Continental Breakfast & Exhibitor Time

8:00–9:00 AM: Welcome and Superintendent's Roundtable

9:00–9:45 AM: Exhibitor Time

9:45–10:45 AM: Thought Leader Discussions

10:45–11:30 AM: ARSA General Membership Meeting, Raffle Drawings, Exhibitor Recognition

11:30 AM–12:00 PM: Exhibitor Teardown

#ARSACON

BREAKOUT I 10:05 - 10:50 AM

PLAN RURAL RESEARCH

Presenter: Ty White | **Location:** Kendrick

Arizona Science Center has received a grant from the Helios Foundation and is looking to find partners to develop authentic research programs in rural and underserved classrooms. Come learn how they can support your STEM programming and give students vital skills in pursuing higher education and career opportunities!

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY MEETS COMMUNICATION MASTERY: ELEVATING COACHING FOR EDUCATOR SUCCESS

Presenter: Ildi Laczko-Kerr | **Location:** McMillian

This session combines the science of psychological safety with advanced communication techniques to empower instructional coaches in fostering trust, collaboration, and professional growth. Participants will explore how personality-based communication strategies, and psychological safety work together to create transformative coaching environments. Through engaging activities and real-world scenarios, attendees will leave with actionable tools to cultivate supportive coaching relationships that drive educator and student success.

COLLABORATION FOR SUCCESSFUL MTSS IMPLEMENTATION: MOVING STUDENTS FORWARD

Presenters: Jaime Festa-Daigle and Carolyn Mann | **Location:** Sycamore

Many schools have MTSS systems on paper, but they fall apart in practice. This session focuses on how Lake Havasu USD partnered with Grand Canyon Education to implement MTSS in a way that worked for the students and staff in their schools. Participants will explore strategies for fostering teamwork and communication among teachers, support staff, and administrators to ensure the needs of all students are met. The session covers best practices for data-driven decision-making and intervention strategies to ensure students receive the necessary support at all tiers. Participants will learn how to build a culture of shared responsibility to address academic and behavioral needs. By taking the time to plan for MTSS, schools can create a system that moves students forward rather than just meets compliance requirements.

NAVIGATING EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION: WHAT LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

Presenters: Shannan Bernal and Jamie Wilber | **Location:** O'Leary

Learn to use certification tools and resources effectively to obtain and maintain employee certification. Participants will learn how to use the LEA portal and ADE resources to differentiate certification support. Participants will also be given strategies and learn how to best support educators in navigating their educator portal to communicate effectively with the Certification Unit's evaluators. Lastly, certification updates will be shared.

BREAKOUT II 11:00 - 11:45 AM

VOICE IS FOR ALL: A LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK TO HELP CAMPUS LEADERS

Presenter: Joe Farnsworth | **Location:** Kendrick

In a sea of ever-changing demands campus leaders are often left alone to lead their campus as they see fit. This is one of the biggest leadership pitfalls, to shoulder all of the decision making with little or no input from others. There is a better way. In this session you will learn to capitalize on a leadership framework built on the guiding principle that Voice Is for All. You will learn about the 4 Pillars of Effective Schools and how campus leaders can harness the voice of those whom they lead.

A SUSTAINABLE EDUCATOR PIPELINE: IMPLEMENTING THE TEACHER REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Presenters: Grant Lapinski and Ryan Salcido | **Location:** McMillian

Arizona's rural schools face unique challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified educators. This presentation will explore the Arizona Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Program (AZTRAP) as a sustainable solution to address these challenges by building a local pipeline of educators. Attendees will learn about the program's structure, benefits, and implementation process while participating in engaging group activities aimed at applying these insights to their own districts.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, CONFIDENCE: MASTERING MEDIA & PUBLIC SPEAKING FOR RURAL LEADERS

Presenters: Heidi Vega, Dani Cole, and Jayla Alston | **Location:** Sycamore

Rural superintendents and school board members are often the face and voice of their communities, called upon to communicate critical issues and advocate for students. This hands-on session is designed to help you confidently navigate media interviews and public speaking using real live cameras and lights in a supportive, interactive environment.

Learn from key expert professionals accredited in Public Relations with on-camera experience and real crisis management expertise as they guide you through best practices for handling tough questions, refining your message, and eliminating buffer words. Through engaging activities, you'll develop strategies to present with clarity, authority, and confidence, ensuring you build trust and effectively represent your district—whether in front of the media, at board meetings, or engaging with stakeholders.

THE BEST KEPT SECRET IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Presenter: Sara Martinez | **Location:** O'Leary

Students who exceed learning expectations share a secret advantage; informed, knowledgeable, and engaged families with high expectations. Discover the powerful yet often overlooked key to transforming rural schools: effective family engagement. In this presentation, we'll explore how strong school-family partnerships drive student success, improve school culture, and boost academic outcomes and attendance. Learn practical strategies to foster meaningful collaboration with families and unlock the full potential of your rural school community. Don't miss this opportunity to uncover the best-kept secret in school improvement!

BREAKOUT III 11:55 AM - 12:40 PM

GRACE, GRATITUDE AND HUMILITY: SUSTAINING K12 LEADERS

Presenter: Dr. Cherryl Paul | **Location:** Kendrick

Leading is a purpose-driven journey but the demands of K-12 education can lead to burnout without the right mindset and support. This session explores how grace, gratitude, and humility serve as essential tools for sustaining educators in their work. Learn strategies to foster resilience, create a culture of appreciation, and lead with openness and service. Through real-world examples and practical applications, discover how these values can enhance well-being, strengthen relationships, and cultivate a positive school climate. Walk away with actionable steps to integrate grace, gratitude, and humility into daily practice empowering yourself to sustain your passion for teaching and leadership.

CRAFTING YOUR LIFE'S BLUEPRINT: DESIGNING A PURPOSE-DRIVEN JOURNEY

Presenter: Anthony Dodson | **Location:** McMillian

Crafting Your Life's Blueprint: Designing a Purpose-Driven Journey equips participants with practical tools to foster resilience, apply trauma-informed care principles, and lead with purpose in their educational or community settings. This interactive session features storytelling, case studies, and engaging exercises to empower attendees with strategies for overcoming challenges, enhancing well-being, and driving meaningful change. Tailored for educators, administrators, and advocates, this workshop encourages collaboration and the application of insights to inspire transformational outcomes. Attendees will leave with actionable techniques and a personalized leadership plan to create positive impact in their communities.

FROM SLOW TO FAST: BUILDING A HIGH-PERFORMING CULTURE IN RURAL SCHOOLS

Presenter: V. Renee Montano | **Location:** Sycamore

Rural schools often face unique challenges, including smaller budgets, limited resources, and sometimes lower expectations. However, these challenges can be transformed into opportunities with the right approach to leadership and culture-building. In this session, I will share how my school moved from a culture of complacency to one of high performance, achieving a "B" rating in the process.

MOVING AI OFF THE BACK BURNER: GUIDANCE FOR RURAL SCHOOLS

Presenters: Kristin Turner and LeeAnn Lindsey | **Location:** O'Leary

Many educators and education leaders are already using AI for personal and professional tasks yet hesitate to integrate it into a school or district-wide plan. If you're ready to move AI to the "front burner" in your organization, this session will provide the guidance you need. We'll explore a statewide AI guidance document and introduce a practical three-task roadmap to help you take the first essential steps toward district alignment. Whether you're just starting or refining your approach, this session will equip you with the tools and insights to bring AI into your district with confidence and purpose.

BREAKOUT IV 2:40 - 3:25 PM

HIRING AND RETAINING YOUR MOST VALUABLE ASSETS

Presenters: Will Ambos and Jamie Wilber | **Location:** Kendrick

This session will provide participants with highlights of current practices in recruitment and retention, not only in Arizona, but across the United States. Participants will be introduced to specific retention tools that can immediately impact leaders and educators.

ELEVATING ORAL LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Presenters: Jennifer Blitz and Kate Wright | **Location:** McMillian

Oral language development is essential for English learners' engagement, content learning, and language development. In Arizona's rural communities, where language isolation and limited ELD services can pose challenges, purposeful oracy instruction ensures access to core content and long-term academic success. High-quality classroom talk goes beyond brief responses—it helps students sustain dialogue, think through speech, and build on peers' ideas, strengthening both learning and belonging.

This interactive session will explore strategies for fostering rich oral interactions that promote deeper engagement. Through video analysis, discussion, and hands-on activities, participants will identify ways to maximize peer collaboration and create linguistically inclusive classrooms. Educators will leave with practical tools to elevate instruction and empower English learners to develop confidence, agency, and academic success.

STUDENT AND CHILD-CENTERED: HOW BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL MODEL LIVES IN RURAL SCHOOLS

Presenters: Pam Powell and Sarah Allen | **Location:** Sycamore

It is unusual to note the theory in practice as readily as it can be seen when overlaying Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model in rural spaces. "The bioecological theory of human development, initially termed an ecological model approach, was originally proposed by Bronfenbrenner to explain how human development occurs, focusing largely on the impact of context" (Rosa & Tudge, 2013, p243). His theory places the child at the center and recognizes the many influences on the child and the influence of the child on his world. This nesting of the child provides opportunities for growth and development within a strengths-based framework which employs place-based pedagogy. Likewise, this framework welcomes community engagement and commitment to the growth, well-being, and care of all within a mutual network.

EDUCATOR MISCONDUCT: REPORTING, INVESTIGATIONS, DISCIPLINE, AND PREVENTION

Presenters: Garnett Burns and David Spelich | **Location:** O'Leary

Director Burns and Chief Spelich will discuss the work of the Investigative and Enforcement Actions Unit. How and when to report educator misconduct, what to expect after making a report and throughout the disciplinary process. We will also discuss our work on prevention to encourage a more proactive approach to behaviors that can lead to educator discipline and student victimization.

BREAKOUT V 3:35 - 4:20 PM

CRITICAL PROGRAMMING, COMMUNITY COLLABORATION, EXPERIENTIAL IMPACT

Presenter: Anne Landers | **Location:** Kendrick

Junior Achievement of Arizona is working to bring critical, impactful programs to rural communities, creating equitable learning experiences for students in K-12, at no cost to rural Arizona schools. These programs focus on financial literacy, career readiness, and entrepreneurship education, empowering young learners with the skills needed for future success. Junior Achievement ensures that all students, regardless of location, have access to these valuable resources by offering flexible delivery methods. Programs can be integrated into classrooms through community volunteers, teacher-led instruction, or through hands-on simulations facilitated by Junior Achievement staff. These experiential learning opportunities help students grasp essential real-world concepts in an engaging and practical way. Best of all, these programs are offered free to the schools, making them accessible to all rural communities in Arizona, and are standards aligned - making the educator's life easier for our rural teachers. Junior Achievement's commitment is to ensure that every student has the tools and knowledge to succeed in an increasingly complex world.

REIMAGINE LEARNING; HOW AI IS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF STUDENT SUCCESS

Presenters: Richard Ramos, Emily Sankey, and Megan Grothman | **Location:** McMillian

Discover how artificial intelligence is transforming education by enabling personalized learning tailored to individual student needs. In this dynamic and hands-on workshop, school administrators and district leaders will explore practical strategies for integrating AI into their schools to enhance student engagement and outcomes. Through real-world examples, interactive activities, and live demonstrations of innovative tools like Magic School and ChatGPT, participants will gain the confidence to implement AI-driven personalized learning approaches. Learn how to overcome common challenges, develop actionable implementation plans, and create a future-ready, student-centered learning environment. Leave equipped with resources, best practices, and proven techniques to empower educators and support student success. Join us to lead the way in modernizing education with AI!

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS: A ROAD MAP TO SUCCESS

Presenter: Sarah Richardson | **Location:** Sycamore

Research highlights the critical importance of ensuring quality early childhood experiences, and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are uniquely positioned to lead the charge. In this session we will discuss how LEAs can implement programs and policies within the community that support early learners, promote school readiness, improve education retention, and optimize school funding to ensure a strong foundation for future success. We will also highlight programs and policies that have successfully leveraged government, municipal, LEA, business, and non-profit collaboratives to provide programs supporting early childhood.

**THERE'S ONE MORE SESSION DURING BREAKOUT V.
LEARN MORE ON THE NEXT PAGE!**

BREAKOUT V 3:35 - 4:20 PM *(continued)*

STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING AND TEACHER RETENTION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Presenters: Vic Diaz and Peter Boyle | **Location:** O'Leary

Leaders know what it takes to successfully implement initiatives to improve their schools. They need goals and measures of success. They need data and monitoring systems. They need aligned strategies and tactics and an understandable strategic plan that is accessible and known to all. Yet few schools and districts have used this approach to address their most critical challenge: building an excellent educator workforce that meets student needs year after year.



BREAKOUT VI 4:30 - 5:15 PM

BORDERLANDS RURAL TEACHER CAUCUS YEAR 4 - TEACHER ADVOCACY

Presenters: Ty White and Christina Musselman | **Location:** Kendrick

For the fourth straight year, ARSA has supported the Borderlands Rural Teacher Caucus. Our cohort of Teachers of the Year and Teacher Finalists hold listening to sessions to collect data from our rural communities and then develop strategies to address those challenges at the local, state and national level. Our policy playbook has been shared with the state legislature, and other educational leadership organizations. Join our session to learn more, and to learn how to be involved!

CHARACTER DOES COUNT: DUAL SIDED REPORT CARD AND SCHOOL CULTURE

Presenter: Dr. Stephanie Miller | **Location:** McMillian

Congress Elementary School, an "A" rated school, opened its doors in 2001 with a dual sided report card in place. Students earn an A to F grade, and can make Honor Roll, based upon 'Behaviors that Support Academic Learning'. The other side of the report card shows academic progress on the standards with a score of one to four. Come learn how the rural district updated the report card and supports a culture of learning based upon the adopted social emotional curriculum.

OUR JOURNEY TO AEF A+ SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE

Presenters: Ginny Sautner and Shannon Williams | **Location:** Sycamore

In order to remain focused on continuous school improvement, our two elementary schools chose to walk the path of the AEF A+ School of Excellence. It was a powerful journey that helped to grow our own leadership skills as building-level administrators and also strengthened our PLCs, our relationships with families and the community, and empowered our students. If you are interested in A+ for your school sites or district, we would love to share our stories about how this process impacted our system as whole.

MAPPING RURAL FUTURES: EMPOWERING STUDENTS WITH MY FUTURE AZ

Presenter: Jessica Howe | **Location:** O'Leary

Discover how rural schools across Arizona can use My Future AZ, powered by Pipeline Connects, to create clear, connected, and personalized pathways for students from middle school through postsecondary success and into meaningful employment. This Arizona-based tool supports students in grades 6-12 by helping them explore career interests, complete ECAP requirements, connect directly with CTE programs, high schools, community college advisors, and local employers.

This session will follow real student journeys that show how My Future AZ connects education and workforce opportunities across Arizona's priority industry sectors. Learn how rural educators are using the platform to close equity gaps, provide individualized career planning, and prepare students for the next steps after graduation.

Attendees will leave with no cost tools and practical strategies to integrate My Future AZ into their schools and classrooms, helping students navigate the path from education to employment with confidence.